MORSE CODE REQUIREMENT - Prior to July 5, 2003, ITU member
countries were required to administer a Morse Code test to applicants seeking
Amateur Radio HF privileges. On July 5, 2003, that international requirement
changed so that each individual administration now may decide for itself whether
on not to require a Morse Code test. What is my view on this issue? Should the
FCC keep some sort of Morse Code test/demonstration as a part of future General
and Extra class license exams?

My reply is a definite YES! Why? Because there are certain aspects of Amateur
Radio that are basic and therefore essential. How is Morse Code essential?
Very simply, it is the mode of communication that can be heard and understood
when most other modes are very dependent on the lack of QRM (man made
interference), QRN (natural interference) and QSB (fading). Code works when
other modes don't.

In an emergency, if one were to misplace his/her microphone, he/she could still
get a signal out of the transmitter by rigging up wires at the key jack and
touching them together in Morse Code fashion. One could even place the rig in
tune position and plug and unplug the power cord or, if plugged into a switched
power socket on the wall, flip the wall switch on and off in code. Morse has
been used by stranded boaters and castaways using whatever they had at hand.
Remember, it is basic. Our prisoners have communicated with each other using
Morse Code tapping on walls between their cells.

Morse Code takes up very little bandwidth -- a very important consideration,
nowadays. And think about the future when bandwidth will be at a much higher
premium than it already is. At this time, only PSK-31 can beat it's bandwidth.
And one needs special equipment to use that.

Indeed, Morse Code has been with Amateur Radio from the beginning and hams all
over the world love it and use it. Many of those hams never use their
microphones. Many others do not even own one. The ability to hear high speed
code and hold a verbal conversation at the same time by hams is legendary. Hams
across the world have their own code language and can understand each other,
even if their spoken languages are unknown by each other. If one of Amateur
Radio's purposes is to increase International Good Will, Morse Code certainly is
a powerful tool to accomplish that.

Yes, many consider Morse Code to be an art form. I certainly agree. It is a
pleasure to be in the presence of a great CW operator. With dedication and
practice, most can learn the code and will enjoy using it on the air. The slow
code sender can usually find someone who has great patience and love in his/her
heart for the newer ham and will work with him/her through an enjoyable QSO
(radio conversation). That first thrill of hearing one's own call letters
coming out of the radio speaker sent by someone who wants to talk to you is
something one never forgets.

Agreed, Morse Code is basic and even ancient. So what? I sat in on a VE
(Volunteer Examiner) session this past weekend where a test taker for the
Amateur Extra exam actually used a "slide rule" to figure out the answers for
the math questions. By the way, he passed with flying colors. He also brought
a calculator but relied on that old slip stick of his. Basic is old. Basic is
good. Basic can always be depended upon. (What if his batteries had died?)

We should never get rid of Samuel F.B. Morse's code nor the Amateur Radio
requirement to know it for the General and Amateur Extra class license exams.
To do so would be a grievous error.

Very sincerely,
Darryl Widman, KF6DI
Licensed 1956
Amateur Extra Class Operator
Santa Barbara, CA